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C O N F I D E N T I A L PRAGUE 000096

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/23/2016  
TAGS: AF EZ NATO PARM PREL PTER  
SUBJECT: A CZECH PRT IN AFGHANINSTAN? CURRENT THINKING IN  
PRAGUE

Classified By: Acting DCM Michael Dodman for reasons 1.5 (b) & (d)

¶1. (C/NF) PolOff met with Vaclav Balek (please strictly protect), Deputy Director of the MFA's Security Policy Department Jan 27. Balek shared that he had attended a recent meeting where FM Svoboda had approved a proposal from the working level that the Czechs should lead a Provincial Reconstruction team in Afghanistan. This approval had turned the issue of a Czech PRT from an idea into a likelihood. Negotiations are ongoing between the MFA and the MOD at the working level. The discussions are following traditional lines: MFA is keen; MOD policy personnel like the idea, but are realistic about the challenges involved; and the General Staff are hesitant, citing the practical difficulties of such a mission. In Balek's opinion Svoboda's approval of the plan indicates that Defense Minister Kuehnl will support the mission. After the Ministers agree, those at the MOD opposed to such a mission will have no choice but to implement it. Balek felt that, while the idea of a Czech PRT is now known, the political steps are still being kept in-house. The MFA is unlikely to make a formal, open approach on this issue to the USG until the visit of Czech MFA Political Director Martin Povejsil to Washington. (Note: Dates for that visit have not yet been set. End note).

¶2. (C/NF) Initial details are still being worked out, but Balek reported the Czechs would like to begin leading a PRT in Southern Afghanistan sometime in 2007. They would like to consider taking over from a U.S. unit. It would be pitched to Parliament as a consolidation exercise, making the Czech presence in Afghanistan more centralized. According to Balek, while FM Svoboda would like to get Government (Cabinet) approval for this plan before the June elections, he does not feel that this is an imperative for success. Balek said the MFA did not believe NATO missions would be affected under the next government, even if the elections brought a minority CSSD government with the informal support of the Communists. The multilateral nature of this ISAF mission, and the fact that the location would be Afghanistan, rather than Iraq, meant that the Communists would not have enough political traction to successfully object.

¶3. (C/NF) Comment: This news echoes and goes further than information we have received in Prague, Washington and Brussels. The mission is no longer just an idea. It appears

the Czechs now intend to proceed with a PRT. The plan to sell the plan to Parliament as a consolidation exercise is a smart move, because it also echoes the sentiment of many in the current-opposition ODS, who are on record as saying Czech forces overseas are spread too thin. Many questions remain. The Czechs still plan to fulfill their roles in providing special forces to CFC-A and in taking over the airport. We can safely assume the Czechs will no longer contribute personnel to the German PRT at Kunduz. We have not received information in Prague about possible partner countries for a Czech-led PRT. Post will continue to investigate and report developments as they occur and stands ready to assist in making this mission a reality. End comment.

DODMAN